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DE RUEHBU #0226/01 0561513
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 251513Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0298
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 1052
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1237
RUEHPS/USOFFICE PRISTINA SR

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000226

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [OREP](#) [EFIN](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PBTS](#) [KV](#) [IR](#) [VZ](#) [BL](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINE FM TAIANA MEETS WITH CODEL ENGEL

REF: BUENOS AIRES 0225

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary and introduction: Codel Engel enjoyed a warm meeting with Argentine FM Taiana on February 21. Meeting participants discussed Argentina's economic recovery and political progress, the bilateral relationship, and regional and world issues. The codel conveyed concern about Iranian activities in neighboring Bolivia, and Taiana thanked the USG for its support in thwarting Iranian efforts to block Interpol capture notices for suspects in the 1994 AMIA bombing. Rep. Engel urged the GOA to recognize Kosovo's independence, and Taiana explained the GOA's reluctance to do so. Taiana explained Argentina's support for Bolivian President Morales, and Rep. Weller thanked Argentina for its assistance in rebuilding Haiti. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Argentine FM Taiana met in his office on February 21 with Rep. Eliot Engel, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Rep. Jerry Weller, Rep. Gene Green, Rep. Maurice Hinchey, and Rep. Virginia Foxx. The Ambassador escorted the delegation. FM Taiana was accompanied by Hector Timerman, the newly appointed Argentine Ambassador to the United States, and members of his staff.

Shared Values and Other Similarities

[1](#)3. (SBU) FM Taiana welcomed the codel, noting the value he places on parliamentary participation in foreign policy and inter-parliamentary contact. He extolled the values shared by Argentina and the United States, particularly our commitment to democracy and human rights. Engel noted this was not his first visit to Argentina, and that he considered Argentina one of the most important countries in his area of responsibility as Chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere. He said he was pleased to lead a bipartisan delegation.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Rep. Hinchey said he was looking to see bilateral relations become more amicable and cooperative, and solicited FM Taiana's suggestions for what the U.S. Congress could do to build on the strengths of the relationship and areas of mutual interest.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Rep. Green said he was struck by similarities in the histories of Argentina and the United States as immigrant nations and melting pots. He said he was pleased to learn of successful business ties and productive areas of cooperation in law enforcement. Due to the importance of the energy sector to his district in Texas, he said he was particularly interested in this area.

[1](#)6. (SBU) FM Taiana agreed that Argentina and the United States are similar in many ways, including Argentina's

federal system of government, with a constitution modeled on the U.S. constitution. He pointed out that Argentina's development since 1930 had been frustrated by protracted periods of instability, political violence, turmoil, and economic decline. Today, however, after 25 years of uninterrupted democracy -- the longest such period in Argentine history -- the country was enjoying sustained economic growth and political stability and would continue to do so. He attributed the recent progress to the non-orthodox policies which the Kirchners had pursued and said their success in fostering greater social progress was key to their strong political support.

Iranian Inroads in the Region

¶7. (SBU) Rep. Weller noted his longstanding interest in regional affairs as head of the Republican caucus on Latin America. He welcomed news of the impending transfer to Washington of newly-appointed Ambassador Hector Timerman (present at this meeting). Weller noted that the codel had just visited Ecuador and Bolivia, and in the latter country there was concern about increased Iranian activity, including plans to launch an Iranian-sponsored television station.

¶8. (SBU) Taiana said he was not aware that the Iranian television station was so close to beginning operations. He stated the GOA had "almost no relations with Iran," stemming in large part from their dispute over Iran's lack of cooperation in investigating the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 persons. Taiana said the GOA remained committed to pursuing investigation (and prosecution of) Iran's role in this incident and the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy that killed 29 persons. He praised the interest and support of recently deceased Rep. Tom Lantos in bringing the perpetrators to justice, and he thanked the USG for its discreet assistance in getting the Interpol General Assembly to approve the issuance of capture notices for several suspects indicted by the Argentine courts.

Sea Change in Latin America

¶9. (SBU) Rep. Foxx thanked FM Taiana for receiving the codel and offering his insights. She said she greatly appreciated the trip as a learning experience about South America, and she emphasized her desire for stronger, more productive relations. Taiana took this opportunity to observe that Argentina's progress should be viewed in the context of "groundbreaking shifts" in the region, including integration efforts and confidence-building measures that had yielded unprecedented levels of peace and security throughout Latin America. He added that countries in the region still needed to foster greater social inclusion internally to give greater legitimacy to their democratic institutions.

Overcoming Tyranny

¶10. (SBU) Rep. Engel noted that he felt at home in Buenos Aires, which reminded him of New York City in many ways, and that he enjoyed reading Argentine history. He said many of those serving today in the GOA were "heroes" for having stood up to the tyranny of the 1976-83 military dictatorship, citing Ambassador Timerman's exile as an example. He said Americans appreciate the valiant struggle for freedom undertaken by so many Argentines. Engel noted the United States would soon have a new president, but in any case, he planned to ensure that the U.S. Congress would make a priority of U.S.-Argentine relations. Taiana thanked the chairman and acknowledged that as a society, Argentina learned the importance of democracy, human rights, and respect for civil liberties -- particularly the importance of tolerating different points of view in a civilized manner.

Venezuela

¶11. (SBU) Rep. Engel offered that USG differences with Hugo Chavez should not determine Argentina's ability to maintain a relationship with the BRV. Argentina should not consider good relations with Caracas and Washington as mutually exclusive, as an "either/or proposition." Engel said nations were multi-faceted, with different issues, needs, and problems.

Kosovo

¶12. (SBU) Rep. Engel urged the GOA to consider early recognition of Kosovo, which was in a unique situation. Due to its special circumstances, Kosovar independence should not be considered precedent-setting. Taiana said the Ambassador had already raised the issue with him. He recalled that Argentina was on the UN Security Council when it approved Resolution 1244, and for the GOA the two key elements of UNSCR 1244 were its insistence on territorial integrity and its call on the two parties to reach an agreement. Kosovo was not easy for Argentina. Taiana agreed that we should not compare situations which are very different, but he insisted that Argentina had "certain sensitivities" about self-determination and therefore needed to tread very carefully, because Argentina's claim on the Malvinas/Falklands was based on "territorial integrity" and a UN call for a negotiated settlement between Argentina and the UK.

Debt Repayment

¶13. (SBU) Rep. Green praised Argentina's remarkable economic recovery and asked whether, under such favorable conditions, the GOA had a plan yet for debt repayment. Taiana acknowledged that Argentina's debt-to-GDP ratio had fallen greatly, that the GOA had paid off the IMF and met all other IFI obligations. He said the GOA had stated its interest in normalizing relations with the Paris Club. He noted the Codel would be meeting later that day with Economy Minister Lousteau, and deferred to him on the details of Argentine debt strategy.

Haiti and Bolivia

¶14. (SBU) Rep. Weller thanked Argentina for its assistance in rebuilding Haiti, and Taiana noted that Argentina's contribution was part of a regional commitment shared with eight other Latin American partners. The Haiti PKO was the only UN mandate in the region, and it was impressive to see how the region was assuming responsibility for building "Haiti's institutions, state, economy, and peace."

¶15. (SBU) Taiana turned to Bolivia and urged support to keep its first indigenous government from failure. He called for goodwill and patience in keeping this experiment from going under, noting that the Morales government marked an important historical phase for democratic consolidation in Bolivia. Failure in Bolivia would be a catastrophe for the region, he warned. Engel noted the delegation had met with Bolivian opposition leaders in Santa Cruz, who had voiced much concern about Evo's attempts to suppress all dissent. Taiana acknowledged the complexity of the situation, but argued that the indigenous had a "compelling argument" when they pointed out that after five centuries of racist, discriminatory mistreatment, they deserved a turn in office. Taiana said he had spoken extensively about Bolivia with A/S Shannon, who "understands the situation there and the need for goodwill, patience, and understanding." Argentina, for its part, would continue to monitor the situation closely.

¶16. (U) Codel Engel cleared this message.

WAYNE